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political demands. All classes were weary of inefficient despotism, and the -prevailing sentiment favoured something in the nature of the British Constitution, with the executive in the hands of the King and the control of the purse in the hands of the Estates. But while the Cahiers of the *noblesse* and the clergy leave most of the graver evils unspecified and uncensured, those of the country parishes give vent to the peasantry's hatred of the feudal system, with its oppressive manorial rights, at once odious to the self-respect and detrimental to the economic interests of the peasant. And while the countryside demands the abolition of feudalism and serfdom, the bourgeoisie claims the removal of the regime of privilege which reserved the plums of the public service for the *noblesse* and the higher ecclesiastics. Mirabeau was the man of the hour.

The members of the States-General were necessarily inexperienced, but the standard of ability and character was high. A conflict of opinion and interest between the two privileged classes and the Tiers état was inevitable, but the peaceful triumph of the latter might possibly have been secured by the influence of a King who combined insight with courage. It is the tragedy of the Revolution that the monarch lacked the resolution to cope with his difficulties ; that, though he was a convinced advocate of reform, he was surrounded by its bitterest enemies; that the worst of his evil counsellors was the Queen ; and that his vacillation destroyed the confidence and good will of the reformers. The oath of the Tennis Court, pledging the members not to separate till a Constitution had been established, pronounced the determination of the Assembly to challenge and override the authority of the Crown if the programme which had brought

them to Versailles
could be realized in no other way. And the
destruction of the
Bastille on July 14 announced that what we
should now call
direct action was an instrument of incalculable
potency in the
hands of an exasperated people.

Though the States-General met without any
intention to
wrest the rudder from the royal pilot, the
hostility of the Court
wrought such a rapid change that the
champions of the British
Constitution who dominated the Assembly at
the start found
themselves displaced by men who held that the
executive
power could not be allowed to remain in
untrustworthy hands.
Within three months power had passed to the
representatives
of the nation, and the sovereignty of the people
was formally